

Message Text

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

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TAGS: PBOR, EIS

SUBJ: DUBLIN EXPECTATIONS FOR NI ASSEMBLY

SUMMARY: GOI EXPECTS NEW NI ASSEMBLY TO HOLD FIRST MEETING AND ELECT CHAIRMAN AT END OF JULY OR IN EARLY AUGUST. ASSEMBLY IS NOT EXPECTED GET DOWN TO MORE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF CHOOSING AN EXECUTIVE, HOWEVER, UNTIL AFTER TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE IN AUTUMN. GOI BELIEVES THAT ALL PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE WILL HAVE TO GIVE ON IMPORTANT POINTS BEFORE ASSEMBLY CAN MOVE TOWARD EFFECTIVE POLITICAL SOLUTION OF IRISH TROUBLES.

1. WE ASKED CONTACT CLOSE TO FONMIN FOR HIS PROJECTIONS ON FUTURE OF NI ASSEMBLY AND FOR ANY RELATED GOI PLANS. THIS WAS SAME SOURCE WHO HAD GIVEN REMARKABLY ACCURATE FORECAST OF NI ELECTIONS RESULTS (DUBLIN 785). WE STARTED BY MENTIONING THIS AND INQUIRING WHETHER HIS CRYSTAL BALL WAS STILL EQUALLY GOOD.

2. SOURCE SAID THAT HIS CRYSTAL BALL ALWAYS HAD MANY CLOUDY PATCHES. FOR EXAMPLE, REFERRING TO BACK TO JUNE 28 ELECTION, HAD HAD BEEN ASTOUNDED BY STRONG

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PERFORMANCE OF MODERATE ROY BRADFORD IN EAST BELFAST,

WHICH IS SUSPOED TO BE HARD-LINE PROTESTANT AREA.

3. ON FUTURE PROSPECTS, SOURCE WAS REASONABLY OPTIMISTIC. HE BELIEVES NEW ASSEMBLY WILL MAKE A SATISFACTORY, THOUGH MODEST, BEGINNING. HE EXPECTS IT TO HOLD FIRST MEETING AT END OF JULY OR IN EARLY AUGUST. FIRST SESSION WILL, HOWEVER, ACCOMPLISH LITTLE EXCEPT TO SHOW THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES CAN SIT AT SAME TABLE. AT THIS MEETING, ASSEMBLY WILL PROBABLY SUCCEED IN ELECTING A CHAIRMAN, AS THIS IS NOT AN IMPORTANT JOB. ASSEMBLY WILL PROBABLY NOT YET SUCCEED IN FORMING NEW EXECUTIVE, HOWEVER. (NOTE: CHAIRMAN OF ASSEMBLY SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH EVENTUAL LEADER OF EXECUTIVE, WHO WILL HAVE FAR MORE IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY.)

4. SOURCE DID NOT EXPECT THAT MUCH PROGRESS COULD BE MADE IN FORMING NEW NI EXECUTIVE UNTIL AFTER TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE HELD IN AUTUMN. WE REPLIED THAT, WHILE WE COULD SEE LOGIC IN THIS, IT COULD ALSO BE ARGUED THAT TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE COULD NOT BE HELD UNTIL UNIONISTS WERE REASSURED BY CREATION OF A FULLY FUNCTIONING ASSEMBLY AND EFFECTIVE EXECUTIVE. SOURCE REPLIED THAT THIS WOULD NOT WORK. FOR ONE THING, SDLP, REPRESENTING CATHOLIC MINORITY, WOULD NOT GO ALONG WITH FORMATION OF MEANINGFUL EXECUTIVE UNTIL IT SAW PROGRESS IN TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE ON SUCH MATTERS AS COUNCIL OF IRELAND. FURTHER, SOURCE SAID IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT ALL SIDES, INCLUDING SDLP, UNIONISTS, AND DUBLIN, WERE GOING TO HAVE TO GIVE WAY ON MANY POINTS BEFORE THERE COULD BE ANY PEACEFUL POLITICAL SOLUTION TO NI TROUBLES. POLITICIANS WOULD HAVE MUCH TROUBLE EXPLAINING TO CONSTITUENTS WHY ANCIENT POSITIONS HAD TO BE GIVEN UP, BUT THERE SIMPLY HAD TO BE SUCH MOVEMENT BEFORE ASSEMBLY COULD REALLY FUNCTION ON POWER-SHARING BASIS. SINCE ALL POLITICIANS HAD THIS PROBLEM, IT MADE SENSE FOR ALL OF THE CHCNAGES TO BE MADE AT SAME TIME AND IN SAME FORUM--TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE. EACH POLITICIAN WOULD THEN BE ABLE TO TELL CONSTITUENTS THAT, WHILE HE HAD GIVEN UP SOMETHING IN PURSUIT OF BELIEFS, OTHER SIDES TO DISPUTE HAD ALSO MADE IMPORTANT CONCESSIONS.

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5. WE WONDERED WHETHER UNIONISTS WOULD BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ACCEPT THIS APPROACH. ANY OBJECTIVE OBSERVER COULD AGREE THAT ALL SIDES TO IRISH DISPUTE WOULD HAVE TO GIVE, BUT UNIONISTS HAD TO GIVE MOST OF ALL TO ARRIVE AT ANY FAIR SYSTEM OF GOVT. SOURCE REPLIED THAT HE THOUGHT MANY UNIONIST POLITICANS HAD SUFFICIENT INCENTIVE TO ATTEND A TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE IN SPIRIT

OF FLEXIBILITY. UNIONISTS WANT ACTION ALONG THREE LINES FROM DUBLIN: RECOGNITION, EXTRADITION, AND SECURITY (ACTION AGAINST IRAL. DUBLIN HAD ALREADY BEEN SHOWING FLEXIBILITY ON THESE SUBJECTS, AND UNIONISTS REALIZED THEY MIGHT GET WHAT THEY NEEDED IF, IN RETURN, DUBLIN COULD SEE THAT CATHOLIC MINORITY IN NORTH WAS GETTING REALLY FAIR BREAK.

6. SOURCE SAID THAT THIS EXPLANATION WAS, OF COURSE, MUCH MORE FRANK THAN ANYTHING GOI SAYING IN PUBLIC. HE ASKED US TO BE CAREFUL IN USING INFO. HE ALSO ASKED US TO NOTE THAT ALL RECENT GOI PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS HAD BEEN AIMED AT REASSURING UNIONISTS, AT SOME EXPENSE TO DUBLIN'S RELATIONS WITH NI CATHOLIC MINORITY.

7. WE COMMENTED THAT WE HAD NOTED FROM PRESS THAT COSGRAVE AND LYNCH WERE HOLDING SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH NI LEADERS, INCLUDING MODERATE REPRESENTATIVES OF PROTESTANT COMMUNITY. WE ASKED WHETHER THERE HAD BEEN FAULKNERITES. SOURCE SAID THAT GOI HAD, OF COURSE, LET IT BE KNOWN THAT IT WAS INTERESTED IN CONSULTING WITH ALL NI SOURCES. WE GATHER THAT THERE HAVE BEEN OR WILL BE BROAD RANGE OF CONSULTATIONS. GOI HAD AGREED, HOWEVER, NOT TO DISCLOSE SUCH MEETINGS TO ANYONE, AS SOME UNIONISTS MIGHT FIND IT VERY EMBARRASSING TO HAVE MEETINGS KNOWN.

8. COMMENT: MAIN PROBLEMS IN ABOVE SCENARIO LIE IN CONSERVATIVE PUBLIC OPINION. IN REPUBLIC, THIS MAY NOT PRESENT OVERWHELMING OBSTACEL, AS ATTITUDE CHANGES HAVE PROGRESSED FAIRLY RAPIDLY. ON NI CATHOLIC SIDE, WE SUSPECT THAT SDLP HAS ALREADY APPROVED OF SCENARIO IN PRIVATE TALKS WITH GOI. FURTHER, NI CATHOLICS MAY HAVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MORE TO GAIN AND LESS TO LOSE THAN EITHER DUBLIN OR NI UNIONISTS. MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM, THUS, MAY BE UNIONIST OPINION, WHICH HAS BEEN ASKED TO MOVE A LONG WAY SINCE 1969. DUBLIN NOW SEEMS TO HAVE TWO BASIC, INTERLOCKING OBJECTIVES FOR NI ASSEMBLY AND TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE: FIRST, A FAIR SHARE OF POWER FOR CATHOLIC NI COMMUNITY; SECOND, MODEST PROGRAMS TOWARD ALL-IRELAND COOPERATION IN NON-CONTROVERSIAL AREAS. THESE OBJECTIVES MUST SEEM REASONABLE ENOUGH TO OUTSIDE OBSERVERS, BUT THEY REPRESENT MAJOR CHANGE FROM PRACTICE OF LAST 50 YEARS. SORENSON

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